

The Tomb of 'The Two Brothers' Revisited

Steven Snape

In 2007 I was involved, in a small way, with the publication of Rosalie's book on the 'Two Brothers' (David 2007), the important Middle Kingdom tomb group from Rifeh. In this paper I hope to shed some light on the original home of this famous pair of long-term residents of The Manchester Museum while doing honour to another, Rosalie herself.

Rifeh is one of the most archaeologically under-explored of the regional cemeteries of large rock-cut elite tombs of the Middle Kingdom in Upper Egypt. Lacking the high-quality decorated walls of roughly contemporary cemeteries, for instance, Beni Hasan, Meir or Qubbet el-Hawa, it did not attract the concentrated attention of early archaeologists. As F.L. Griffith put it in 1889, 'Champollion and Lepsius passed by and left them to the tender mercies of later Egyptologists hurrying up the river to Thebes' (Griffith 1889a: 121). Perhaps also, when compared to other sites of a similar nature, it represented too daunting a task - the necropolis at Rifeh is vast and relatively complicated in its physical layout. When compared to, for instance, Beni Hasan, the rock-cut tombs at Rifeh are not arrayed in one neat terrace of a relatively limited number of major tombs, but are both much greater in number and have much greater variability in size, and are spread over the eastern face of the Gebel Durunka mountain in a more irregular fashion (Figure 1). In this respect, Rifeh is, unsurprisingly, most similar to the necropolis at Asyut which has both a similarly complex layout and underdeveloped archaeological history, and which has only recently been the subject of a focused archaeological project after more than a century of neglect and accessibility (see e.g. Kahl 2007).

Part of the problem for early explorers of the site was the nature of Deir Rifeh itself. The term 'Deir' refers here to a cluster of Coptic dwellings and religious structures which grew up around the large tombs at the northern end of what might be thought of as the greater Rifeh cemetery. Many of the largest and most immediately interesting of the Rifeh tombs (i.e. those numbered III-VII by Griffith) were within the 'Deir', and the written accounts of Griffith, W.M.F. Petrie, P. Montet and M. Pillet (see below) make it clear that they were still being occupied by Coptic villagers during their work at the site.

Griffith at Deir Rifeh

The first significant fieldwork to be carried out at Rifeh was Griffith's epigraphic work, which had come about through chance (for his account see Griffith 1889a). In 1886-7 he and Petrie undertook a trip to 'many an-out-of-the-way and unexplored corner of Upper Egypt' including the 'almost unknown tombs cut in the Western Cliff at the Coptic village of Dêr Rifeh' which had been recommended to them by Sayce. Petrie and Griffith spent 31 December 1886 'completely exploring the hill above the town' of Asyut. The following day they walked from the cliff above Asyut to Deir Rifeh and, on arriving at the latter, quickly copied some of the accessible texts in what were to be assigned the designations Tombs I and II. Griffith returned to Deir Rifeh in May 1887 when he spent

a week revising and adding to his copies of the texts in the tombs. In the winter of 1887-8 Griffith returned again to Asyut and Deir Rifeh, intending to work at the latter in January-February 1888, but in the event he was too busy at Asyut to be able to do so. Griffith did not provide a location map of the Deir Rifeh tombs he examined although he did give sketch-plans of Tombs I and II (Griffith 1889b: Pl. 16).

Griffith numbered the Rifeh tombs from south to north, Tomb I belonging to the Middle Kingdom *ḥry-tp* ʕ3 Khnum-Nefer. This tomb Griffith describes as a very large single chamber of which a substantial portion had been quarried away, and which 'forms the centre of a large group of about 150 tombs' (Griffith 1889a: 181) which were uninscribed and in several rows on the face of the cliff. Further north Griffith specifically refers to Tomb II, with its scant ink inscriptions from the New Kingdom, and about 100 yards north of Tomb II a further set of tombs which were difficult to assess because they were located within the Deir. Those which Griffith was able to access were mainly assigned by him to the New Kingdom (Tomb III, which he assigned to Rameri and gave a late 19th Dynasty date, the 'very large' Tomb IV belonging to the *ḥry pḏt* Tutu son of Rahotep, Tomb V belonging to the *ḥm ntr tp* Nana, and the 'great' Tomb VI) although he recognised that Tomb VII, with its portico with massive polygonal columns and containing a Coptic church in its main hall, inscribed for the *ḥ3ty-ʕ* Nakht-Ankh, was clearly Middle Kingdom in date.

Petrie at Deir Rifeh

When Petrie also returned to Rifeh, in 1906, his main concern was the excavation of the cemetery which lay below the rock-cut tombs, and not these tombs themselves (which he notes were still 'fully occupied' - Petrie 1907: 2). However, he, or rather his assistant Mackay, did work in Tomb II which was close to, but not part of the 'Deir', resulting of course in the discovery of the 'Two Brothers' group. This work also produced other Middle Kingdom burials; a group of four box coffins in a chamber similar to that of the 'Two Brothers' which was 'a little south of this along the edge of the rock terrace', then 'nearby on the south, was a small tomb, with a box coffin' and finally 'one other tomb' containing a further box coffin' (Petrie 1907: 12-13). Apart from Tomb II, none of these tombs is located on Petrie's 1:20,000 site map (Petrie 1907: pl.VIII) which also give the approximate locations of Deir Rifeh and Tomb VII, his 'Tomb Unfinished' (Figure 2), and Tomb I (Khnum-Nefer). Petrie also provided (1907: pl.XIIIE) 1:200 sketch-plans of another three tombs; Griffith's Tomb I & II (which he attributes on this plan to Khnumu-Aa) and, in addition, a large tomb located between these two tombs, which he referred to as an 'unfinished' tomb.

Montet and Pillet at Deir Rifeh

In the period from 1910-14 the site was revisited by Montet and Pillet, the former to check and add to the epigraphic copies made at Asyut and Deir Rifeh by Griffith and the latter to carry out a detailed architectural survey of the tombs. Montet's account of his work at Asyut and Deir Rifeh was published in three articles between 1928-36 in the journal *Kémi* (Montet 1928, 1930-5, 1936), in which he followed the numbering of tombs given by Griffith but, curiously, he made no reference to the discovery of the 'Two Brothers' burial in 'Tombeau II'.

Pillet's plans of the Rifeh tombs were published at the same time as Montet's 1936 article (the one which is concerned principally with Rifeh rather than Asyut) on his epigraphic work, but in *Mélanges Maspero* (Pillet 1935-8). Pillet described the tombs as extending 'sur un longeur de près de deux kilomètres' with a Coptic church ('couvent') as part of the northern group (Pillet 1935-8: 61). Pillet's general plan of the extended site (1935-8: fig.1) includes not only the northern group of the Deir Rifeh tombs but also the northern part of the eastern face of the Gebel Durunka as far as the necropolis of Asyut and including the unfinished tombs about three kilometres to the north-north-west of Deir Rifeh which had been noted by Petrie. Pillet's work was largely focused on a detailed architectural study of the large Rifeh tombs, and he produced a set of high-quality plans of several of the tombs known and worked on by Griffiths and by Petrie. These plans make a real contribution to the recording of the larger and more important tombs at Deir Rifeh, especially in the context of a detailed record of the state of these tombs in 1912. There are, however, a number of peculiarities in Pillet's publication. The most important of these peculiarities is that he makes no reference to earlier work at the site. If he had been unaware of Griffith's 1886-7 work and Petrie's discovery of the 'Two Brothers' in 1906 this in itself would be a little odd, but to show no sign of having subsequently become aware of this work before revising it for publication in 1935-8 seems even odder. This seeming unawareness of the Griffith work at Rifeh is reflected in Pillet's numbering of the tombs in the Deir Rifeh cluster using his own north-south system, even though Montet used the Griffith numbering system in his publication. As far as Petrie's work is concerned, Pillet planned Tomb II in great detail (Pillet 1935-8: fig.9) but did not include the sloping shaft and chamber of the 'Two Brothers' tomb itself. Of the other tombs which he planned in some considerable detail, Pillet was able to identify the owner of the tomb of Tutu (Pillet 1935-8: fig.8), but not that of Nakht-Ankh (which he referred to as 'Tombeau d'Inconnu' - Pillet 1935-8: fig.4).

The plans Pillet published were (i) a main plan of the terrace with the entrances to tombs I-VI in his numbering system; these equate to the tombs between and including those of Tutu (Griffith IV) and Nakht-Ankh (Griffith VII), (ii) a detailed plan of his tombs VI (Tutu) and VII, which allows his tomb VII to be connected to the main plan by overlap with Tomb VI, (iii) a detailed plan of his Tomb I (i.e. Nakht-Ankh, Griffith Tomb VII), and (iv) a detailed plan of Tomb II (un-numbered on his system), which cannot be directly connected to Pillet's main plan (although the main plan is annotated to note that this tomb is approximately 160 m. south of the tomb of Tutu).

The Liverpool/Asyut Deir Rifeh Project

In the past century little scholarly attention has been given to the site of Deir Rifeh. Part of the reason for this has been the significant military presence in the area of the Gebel Durunka which has made archaeological activity impossible. In recent years this restriction has eased. However, much work has been carried out since 1912 by the Antiquities Service at Deir Rifeh itself, most notably the removal of the remains of the abandoned Coptic occupation, revealing even further, relatively small, rock-cut tombs, and sets of rock-cut stairs leading to the larger tombs (Figure 3). However, the site is still important to the local Coptic population, especially one of the tombs (Pillet Tomb IV - not numbered by Griffith) which is still active as the 'host' of a Coptic chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Teodros and Tomb VII which still contains an operating church within its hall.

In October/November 2010, as part of the preliminary stages of the development of a fieldwork project between the universities of Liverpool and Asyut focused on the Deir Rifeh necropolis, a reconnaissance survey was made in the necropolis. The purpose of this reconnaissance survey was to (i) locate the tombs which were known from the publications of work carried out over 100 years before, (ii) reconcile the various accounts of the specific locations of those tombs, and (iii) assess the potential of the necropolis of rock-cut tombs which is very extensive and packed with rock-cut tombs. This work was carried out by members of the joint Liverpool /Asyut project, specifically Dr Steven Snape and Dr Ashley Cooke (Liverpool) and Dr Osama Sallama (Asyut). In July 2012 a further visit was made to the Deir Rifeh tombs to carry out checks on data collected in 2010, and to add to the photographic record of the Rifeh necropolis. The Liverpool/Asyut team is grateful for assistance provided by the Ministry of Antiquities, local representatives of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and the Thames Valley Ancient Egypt Society.

The plan of the site presented as Figure 4 represents an initial attempt to produce a location map of those tombs which were the subject of the work by Griffith, Petrie, Montet and Pillet, based on a number of sources. These sources include (i) Survey of Egypt maps, including the recent 1:50,000 series, (ii) Pillet's plan of the Deir Rifeh tombs, (iii) GPS readings taken by the Liverpool/Asyut team, (iv) Line-and-compass measurements taken by the Liverpool/Asyut team to connect the northern cluster with the 'Two Brothers' tomb, Petrie's 'Unfinished Tomb' and the tomb of Khnum-Nefer.

It must be stressed that this is a preliminary plan of the site pending future detailed work. It does not attempt to record even in general terms the very great number of visible rock-cut tombs which have not been the subject of earlier work. It also does not fully reconcile the relative positions of the tombs on this plan (which can be regarded with some confidence having been checked on the ground by the Liverpool/Asyut team) with other published topographic data for the region. It does, however, represent a step forward in understanding the nature and extent of this important necropolis and the position within it of the 'Tomb of the Two Brothers'.

Figure Captions

Figure 1

The necropolis at Deir Rifeh. The portico-entrance to Tomb VII is visible on the far right, while the large tombs on the centre left include that of Khnum-Nefer.

Figure 2

Petrie's 'Unfinished Tomb'.

Figure 3

View of the central part of the Deir Rifeh group in 2012. The large tomb top right is Griffith Tomb VI and the stairs on the left lead to Pillet Tomb V (not numbered by Griffith). The two large tomb entrances on the lower level (and the stairs) were previously covered by the Coptic Deir.

Figure 4

Preliminary Plan of the Necropolis at Rifeh

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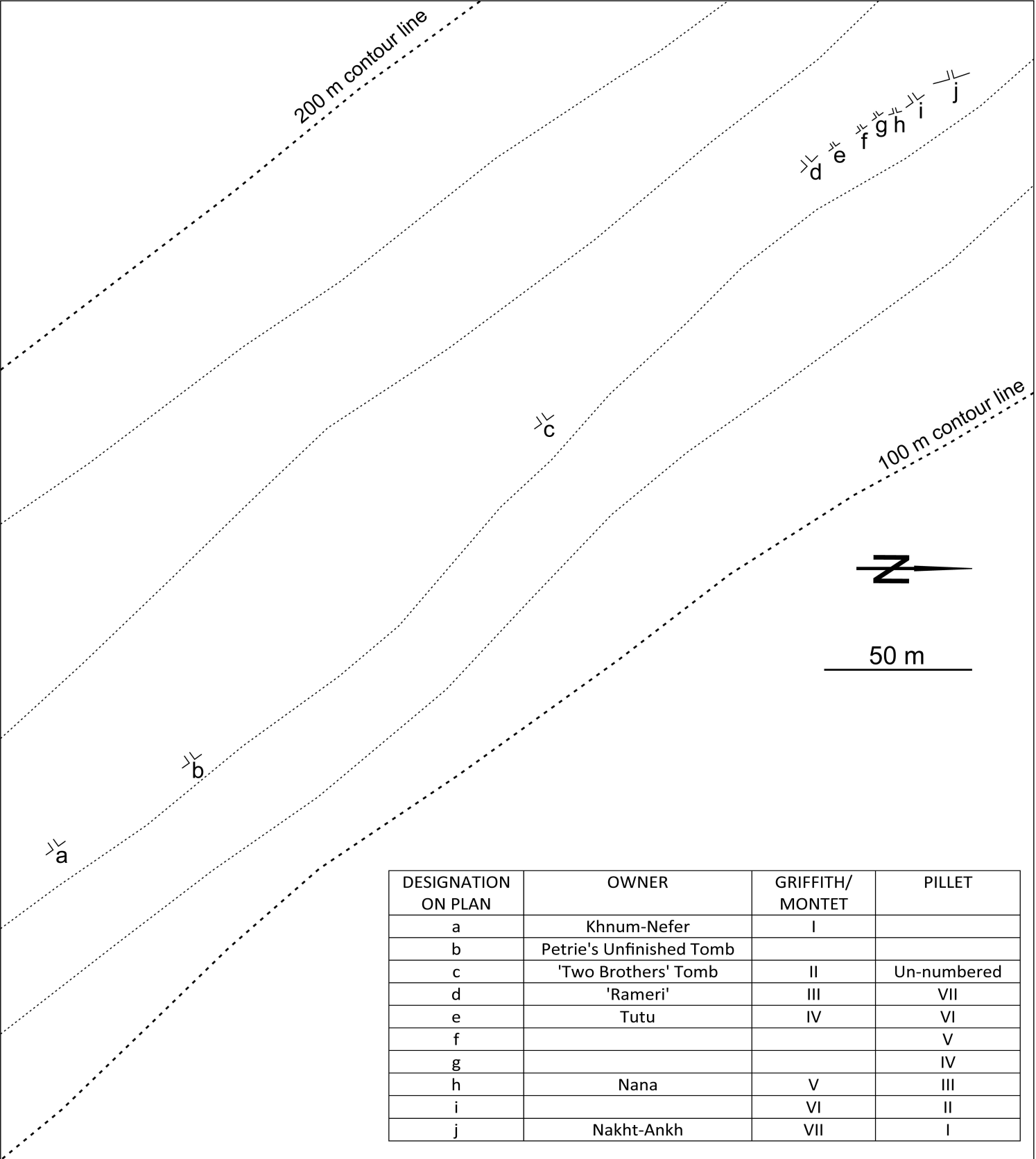
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DESIGNATION ON PLAN	OWNER	GRIFFITH/ MONTET	PILLET
a	Khnum-Nefer	I	
b	Petrie's Unfinished Tomb		
c	'Two Brothers' Tomb	II	Un-numbered
d	'Rameri'	III	VII
e	Tutu	IV	VI
f			V
g			IV
h	Nana	V	III
i		VI	II
j	Nakht-Ankh	VII	I